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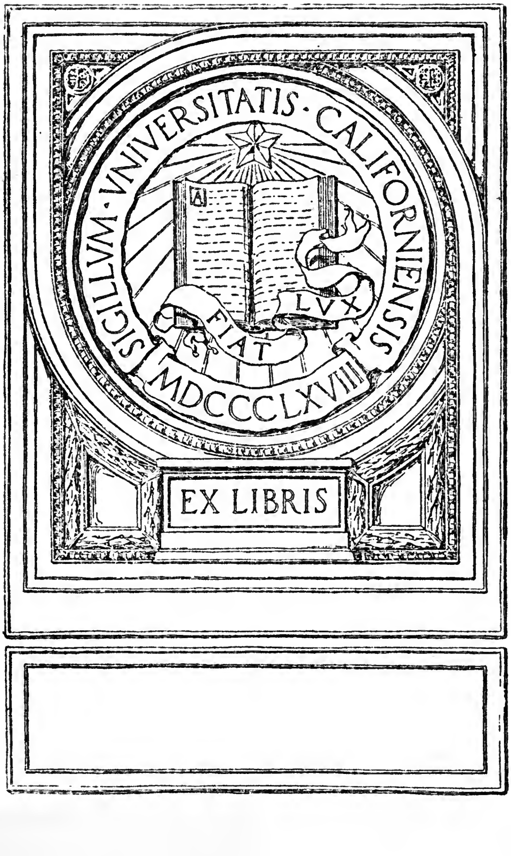
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IN A FRENCH MILITARY HOSPITAL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

EVERYDAY LIFE AMONG THE HEAD-HUNTERS

AND OTHER EXPERIENCES FROM EAST TO WEST

With 34 Illustrations from Photographs

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IN A FRENCH MILITARY HOSPITAL

BY

DOROTHY CATOR

AUTHOR OF
"EVERYDAY LIFE AMONG THE HEAD-HUNTERS"

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

IN A FRENCH MILITARY HOSPITAL

CHAPTER I

ARRIVAL IN FRANCE

It is already July, and things have to be printed in September, I believe, so I am afraid I shall not have time to give you any real account of life out here. But as I have a bad attack of tonsillitis, and may not work for a few days, I will anyway start.

At the end of last year we heard that some of the French hospitals were in great need of nurses, and one of my friends, begged by a French doctor to come and help, went out with a party of ladies, only one of whom was really trained, to see what they could do, and I promised to follow later if I were really needed. A letter arrived in due course reminding me of my promise. The need was urgent, my friend, in her division alone, having sixty-four beds single-handed to look after; so Crib, one of my sisters, and I settled to come. I was warned not to bring anyone who had been too well trained, as the conditions under which we worked would be more than they could bear, and that we must, whatever happened, get on with the French medical authorities under whom we were working. The necessities were, a knowledge of French and tact and readiness to do anything. Speaking as nurses, we had apparently made ourselves very much disliked in the north of France by that strong insular failing of ours, "always knowing best."

But to go on. We could talk French, and we certainly weren't going to own that we were deficient in the other qualities! So we made our preparations, and crossed to Boulogne.

Saying good-bye is always to be avoided if possible, and finishing up things, when you lead a very busy life at home, is never easy; but it is worse when you are leaving three children behind you. Only the whole thing was saved from tragedy by the ludicrously opposite views taken by all the friends I love most in the world on my leaving my family and going at all. I was everything from an arch fiend to an archangel, and I hated disappointing those I love; but at the end I totted everything up, and came out exactly where I was before—an ordinary woman who felt obliged to go and help. Because you have children you hate to leave, who will be surrounded with love and care the whole time you are away, that is surely no reason for not doing just a little to try and help to relieve the awful suffering this war is causing everywhere.

Going across the Channel, we gave the man a shilling to put two life-belts ready for us to put on directly we were torpedoed, and we felt it was money wasted when we arrived safely. I could not imagine why two of our friends wore such enormous coats, and looked so like barrels, but Crib found out that they, poor things, had gone a step further than we had, and had promised their people to *wear* life-belts.

We had to wait a long time at Boulogne. Stretcher after stretcher of our wounded passed us for the hospital ship. What a common sight that must be by now, and yet can anyone see it without yearning to do, as they have done, their utmost ?

At last we were off, and France, with a few exceptions, looked just the same as it always does in times of peace ; but motor ambulances and trains of wounded, and armoured motor-cars racing along the roads at our side, and our own soldiers ploughing in French fields were sights to which we were strangely unaccustomed, and sights which made us long to see and know more of what was passing on that grim stage out of sight, and yet so near to us, on which so many of those we love most in the world had played, or are still playing, their parts.

CHAPTER II

SETTLING DOWN

WE arrived at our destination in about two days, to find we were to start alone in an old town unknown to fame or even to English tourists. It was the most depressing morning, very grey and drizzly, and by the evening, after wandering up and down cobblestones all day looking for houses or rooms to live in, which always sounded just the thing till we got there, we were tired out in mind and body.

Even the most elementary rudiments of sanitation were apparently non-existent; all furniture also was entirely wanting in most places; but they would be very delighted to let us have rooms and houses as they stood, for much more than we could afford to give for them, and we could put what furniture we liked into them. It sounded extraordinarily kind and useful, but we were terribly conscious of having no little loose trucks of furniture among our luggage, and we tried to explain that we would rather wait a little before deciding. But not a bit of it; we found ourselves obliged to live in a sort of mesmerised nightmare of house-hunting. The kind ladies of the French Red Cross were working hard to get us well housed when we arrived, and well housed we should be with or without our leave. They had not the slightest idea what we really wanted, nor, to tell the truth, had we. We had had no time to think, nor were we allowed five minutes alone to take in the situation. We had started work at the hospital at once, and it became most embarrassing whenever we left our work, however tired, to find kind people at the hotel or at any and every corner of the town ready to carry us off to see new impossibilities, and when we were tired of making excuses, off we should start again the same wearisome round with another very sanguine, optimistic, charming French lady, meeting round the first corner her arch enemy, full of hurt feelings because she really had thought we rather liked the fourth house of the seven she had shown us the day before, or anyway that we had thought the garden pretty. Then in our misery we should cut some other lady a moment afterwards, and remember, just too late, she was someone's friend's sister, who had two houses in exactly the opposite direction, which we ought to have been looking at at that moment.

Most thankfully would any wire summoning us anywhere have been received by both Crib and me those first few days, but at last we struck once and for all, and they woke up to the cold, invincible fact that we were poor. Someone had said we were rich. The truth was out. Everything now became clear. We have never found out who said it, but perhaps it is as well, as we owe them two or three days of real, acute misery! After that we were left to ourselves, and soon found what we wanted, a nice woman and her daughter living in a house in a garden just outside the town, with very small rooms to let, but with glorious views of range after range of blue mountains from the windows. We have been there ever since.

CHAPTER III

OUR HOSPITAL

THE day we arrived we were introduced to the Médecin Chef, an elderly, very attractive-looking man, and to Monsieur le Major, the second in command, a tall, grave, nice-looking man, quite young and dreadfully lame. He had won their Military Cross and another *galon* at the front, but a bomb, which burst close to him at the beginning of the war, had partially paralysed the nerves of his spine and side, and had sent him back from the trenches with a heart which will never, they are afraid, be up to much again. Before coming out we were given rather an ugly picture of French doctors.

It exists, I'm afraid, but our personal experience has been a very happy one. Nothing, from the day we arrived, could have exceeded the courtesy and great kindness of the doctors with whom we have worked. They have supported us through thick and thin, though I must add that if they hadn't, staying at all would have been out of the question. The hospital on the outside is a picturesque-looking place, like an old convent, built round three sides of a small square garden with shady trees and a fountain, and at the back is the main entrance, with broad flights of stairs on either side of it, and between them a statue of St. Vincent de Paul. There is also a large walled kitchen garden on the other side, with a glorious pergola of vines, about 150 yards long, leading up to a statue of Our Lady, and flanked by a river where we can generally find a little air even on the hottest days.

The hospital is divided into two parts, the civil and the military, the civil side being the infirmary for the town, and taking in women and children as well as men.

Before the separation of Church and State it was looked after by the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul; now the poor, unfortunate people are at the mercy of anyone the town can find to accept their uniform and their miserable salaries of £14 to £15 a year. The chances of getting anyone suitable must be wonderfully rare, and I can answer for it, by bitter experience, that two out of the three surveillantes now in charge are hopelessly unsuitable for their work, and can only bring the posts entrusted to them into the most utter disrepute. I can't imagine a better Purgatory for those who were so successful in getting rid of even the Religieuses who were spending their time in relieving suffering, than to be condemned to be nursed through any serious illness by those who have taken their place.

At the head of the internal economy of the hospital, the Town Council's representative, a thing called an *econome*, reigns supreme, and, for the sake of a quiet life, and I suppose because it was cheaper, the military authorities, to whom we belong, agreed, even after the war had started, that he should go on running everything. The result is awful, you never get any further; the military assure you that the civil authorities are responsible, the civil that the military are, and in the end you always have to deal with this awful *econome*, whose name suits him better than any name has ever suited any owner—a thin, steely-eyed looking being whose work is to refuse you everything you ask for; to watch every mouthful put on to your plate, however distasteful; to look with miserly agony to see if there isn't just one more trifle to be cut off; to buy the greatest quantity and worst quality of anything in the shape of food; and to steal about the place trying to find someone wasting something. Not very pleasant work, poor man!

It was some time before I found out who he was. Everyone was in awe of him, and looked upon him as an awful kind of bogy. We were busy disinfecting and cleaning one of the wards in my division one day, and I had just noticed a disagreeable-looking man among my *infirmiers*, who seemed to be inclined to talk instead of to work, when, fortunately for him, he left the room. It was the merest chance I had not already given him a wet duster, and told him where to clean.

My men were bursting with delight; one of them explained to me that he was a man feared and dreaded by everyone, and that when they knew he was about, they hid from him, or, if they were too late to do that, they found some excuse to slip out of one door as he came in at the other. I really couldn't imagine anyone having quite such an extraordinary effect on either Crib or me, and whenever he appears, instead of running away, there we are; but he doesn't seem to relish the change in the least, which is queer, and he appears less and less. We don't think the amount of love he bears us can exhaust him much, but perhaps we don't understand *economes*. They are strange beings, to their wives too, as far as we can make out.

One day he went on like a mad Eastern who has suddenly gone amok, because the Ariège schoolmasters had brought me some coffee and sugar for our wounded. When I took it to the kitchen to be made as usual, he happened to be there, and he stood like a raving madman in front of me and screamed, while I watched him interestedly, but couldn't make head or tail of what was the matter, except that he had got some violent kind of seizure which made him look even uglier than usual. His wife soon came, which was a relief, and a battle-royal ensued between them; eventually I grasped that the schoolmasters of Ariège had overlooked him in presenting the coffee to me; I should have thought they had overlooked us both and were only thinking of the wounded, but I said no more and left them to it. It must have been edifying for the cooks; I only hope they didn't know that the whole story she was screaming at him, to save his pride but to make him ashamed of his rage, about the Médecin Chef begging me to take the coffee, was a pure invention from beginning to end. I am sorry for that woman, she must have been very badly off for something to do when she entrusted her future happiness to the *econome's* keeping; but to go on to the three surveillantes.

Two of them we only meet at food times, but we soon learnt to know them. The one is a witch-like fury who chatters as only a mad woman could, and screams with rage at everyone and everything just as the humour takes her. It makes her a tiring companion, especially as there is nothing, however nonsensical or however uncomplimentary, even about England, that she doesn't assert and know far better than anyone else ever could. She is a widow. What a blessed release it must have been for him, and mercifully there are no children to carry on her wonderfully ungracious likeness! It is all we can do sometimes to stand her even for a few minutes, and yet the poor men in her wards have to bear her morning, noon, and night, and it is rather heart-breaking to know how they feel it and to be able to do nothing. One of the old blind men the other day, after making certain that he couldn't possibly be overheard, opened his poor sad heart to us, and entreated us to come, more and more of us, so that we could look after them too, and let the fury go. Imagine being blind and having to be entirely dependent on a screaming woman.

Poor things! I do trust they may be delivered from her soon.

The other surveillante is quite a different character. I can't pretend she hasn't a temper which she sometimes loses, but she is a very kind, motherly, charming woman with that saving quality a keen sense of humour, which helps her through a great deal in her life which would otherwise be intolerable. She is also racy and amusing, and has been kindness itself to us from the first, showing for anyone of that rank a wonderful insight and comprehension of the whole situation, and cheering us on our way with innumerable little kindnesses. I don't know what we should do without her. The "situation," briefly, is our position in the hospital.

Little did we realise what we were undertaking that grey morning when we arrived here. We knew that working in a French hospital wouldn't be a bed of roses, and when the Médecin Chef took us round the wards it was certainly not roses we smelt —on that point there was no deception. We had heard that the jealousy of the French ladies was one of the greatest drawbacks to working in their hospitals, but we were relieved to hear from our doctors that we should have nothing of that sort to cope with, as there were no ladies, and practically no one who could be jealous; certainly no one who counted, and that in any case we were directly responsible to them and to no one else.

It all sounded fairly simple, and the next morning we arrived to start our work.

That at least was our intention, but the surveillante on the military side—the third, of whom I have not yet spoken —thought otherwise, and was ready for us. She was a coarse-looking, fat woman of about forty, who, having proved herself a capable charwoman and help on the civil side, had been delighted when the town, finding no one to accept their wretched pittance of less than one franc a day, had raised her to a position for which she was entirely unsuited, and the power from which she enjoyed and abused, as those who appointed her might well have known she would. She was, as the Médecin Chef used to reiterate, "très grossière mais très grossière," "une femme du peuple," but that was rather insulting to *le peuple*, whom we found extraordinarily attractive.

Anyway she was quite ready for us, and for the next few weeks she gave us a terrible time; there was absolutely no humbug about her attitude to us, no pretence of *entente cordiale* (for that we admired her). She hated and dreaded our coming, and she hated and dreaded us, and was absolutely determined from the first that if anything or anyone could make us go, she would.

She left nothing unturned in the bitterness of the campaign she organised against us; we didn't know it was possible for even jealousy to make anyone quite so unscrupulous in the methods used. Not content with screaming at us and about us morning, noon, and night, whenever in fact she knew the doctors' backs were turned, she never lost an opportunity of trying to poison the minds of our patients and *infirmiers* against us. Truth meant nothing to her, so that her efforts were crowned with a certain amount of success. Some of the *infirmiers* became impossible and some of our patients became sulky and bad-tempered, but we have at last won through, and she has accepted defeat with more grace, or perhaps it would be truer to say less struggling, than we should have thought possible, though we still have to be prepared for ugly moments.

She started by assuring us that there was absolutely nothing to be done anywhere, that all the washings and dressings were over, and that she couldn't think of anything for us to do. We felt fools, but didn't own it, even to each other. We asked for basins and dusters—there weren't any; for soap—there was none: there was nothing; but fortunately there was a town, and fortunately they couldn't lock up our sense of smell, which more and more told us there there was work to be done. We soon previded ourselves with scrubbing brushes and other necessaries, and started, to the joy of the doctors, and, when they took it in, to the joy of our patients too, and to the speechless horror and consternation of everyone else.

Never again, we hope, can the hospital quite go back to the state we found it in. How the typhoids, who came back to us from the trenches to be nursed back to health and strength, had lived in those surroundings only Providence knows.

CHAPTER IV

DIFFICULTIES OF OUR TASK

OUR *infirmiers* consisted, for the most part, of the wrecks of the army, of those who were physically unfit for service, and of the men who rather than go to the front would do anything, even nurse the sick and wounded, if that would save them from it.

One of mine showed me proudly one day a photograph of himself in a smart cavalry uniform, and after looking at it fixedly, he said with a pained laugh, "And now I am an *infirmier ;*" the contrast between the two pictures, what he had been and what he was now, was almost more than he could bear. What a world of difference there is between our points of view!

That *infirmier* is, we know, a scoundrel, but we can't help liking him. He has a refreshingly fair mind on the whole, and he doesn't bear any malice though he has a hot, difficult temper, and has had to work much harder since these English ladies with their ridiculous ideas of cleanliness arrived. He has been most faithful to us from the first, in spite of the shocks he has had to bear on several occasions. I forgot to take a special temperature one night, but before the doctor's visit next day an imaginary one had been added for me by this *infirmier*, who couldn't understand my insisting on also adding an interrogation point to his kind way of saving me.

On another occasion the *econome*, who has a prejudice to disinfectants in the water when you are washing walls on account of their expense, suddenly appeared to find my men all using them, I having insisted on them, in my infectious wards. I wasn't there, but on coming back they told me he had asked them about it, but that they had assured him that they were using none, so that I should have no unpleasantness. I protested, but it is difficult to know how much to say on those occasions. If I expected too much I should be met by " Madame, je me mettrais en six pour vous, mais cela je ne peux pas faire."

The French attitude to truth is of course entirely different from the English one. The great point of life with them is to be charming and get through life gracefully; therefore, any lie which helps that, is more than permissible, if only it is told well enough not to be found out.

Everyone lies, apparently, from the

highest to the lowest, with a wonderful glibness. I was startled once when I caught a French governess I had in an utter lie, and when I explained to her forcibly what she had said, instead of being offended and giving me notice at once, she laughed with amusement and said, " Mais, madame, ce n'était que pour éviter les désagréables "! " Eviter-ing désagréables," or trying to, goes on from morning to night in this hospital, and among the *infirmiers* it has got to such a pitch that you never dream of believing anything they say. But how those in authority can so entirely forget the claims of the wounded in their choice of their nurses is more than we ever shall be able to understand.

They are almost all, without constant supervision, filthy in their work, and many of them add to that being filthy in their persons too. They are not fit to walk into a sick-room, much less to be nursing there. Oh! the filth we found in every hole and corner, in lavatories, fireplaces, cupboards, drawers, on open shelves, and even under beds and by the heads of men whose charts alone showed the danger they were in.

With carbolic lozenges in our mouths and holding our breaths, and with constant runs to the window, we somehow got through that first fortnight or three weeks, till at last we began to see light, and to feel that we could breathe in fairly clean wards, and that our patients were no longer running imminent risks of typhoid or diphtheria epidemics, or both.

It was an awful time, but we were thankful we had come, though my heart misgave me when Crib suddenly went down with every symptom of typhoid. The doctor said, "Watch her carefully," and

I did, in my hours off, and mercifully she recovered in a day or two, but we both thought that it was only having been inoculated twice which saved her.

People would be wise, when talking to poor people, to be careful of the word "inoculated." Just before we left England, a man in the Westminster slums told one of the clergy working there that I was going to the front and had been "intoxicated" three times. I'm afraid my way of finding courage for the venture would appeal to them at once as being both simple and practical.

But to go back to the hospital. There was only one among all the *infirmiers* who was ready to be taught the difference between dirt and cleanliness, and who caught me trout in his spare moments, and that was the one of whom I have already spoken. With the others, those first weeks, it was war to the knife, a knife ever sharpened by the untiring efforts of the surveillante, who always stood ready with a bottle of rum, uncorked, to reward those who openly defied us, mixed with warm sympathy for everything they kicked at in our rule. The drain on both must have been great, as *infirmiers*, who have spent their lives lying on their beds with cigarettes in their mouths—except for a short straightening-up time before the doctors' visits—are not going to change to a life of work without a good deal of struggling.

Our path has certainly not been a thornless one, but two charming French girls, who come every morning to the operation-room to do dressings, have been great helps to us all through: and we have found it wonderfully soothing to be able at all times to draw tears or laughter from them, according to what the exigencies of the moment required. They had apparently tried at one time to help in the wards too, but their lives had been made such a burden that they had given it up, and confined themselves to the operation-room in which (*Deo gratias*) the surveillante is not allowed.

In contradistinction to the two attractive women downstairs were two more women upstairs whom poisonous jealousy of us drove into the ranks of the surveillante, though the unedifying scenes we sometimes heard between them made us doubt if even that strong link of mutual jealousy wasn't a little strained at times.

The eldest, a nervous little overworked middle-aged woman, who gives music lessons in the town and spends all her spare moments at the hospital, tries by ingratiating smiles, which she throws at us on any and every occasion, however unsuitable, and by constantly shaking our hands—a trick which is apt to get annoying after a time—to disguise both from herself and from us the nature of the disease from which she is suffering. I am sorry for her, she has such unworthy little ways, and yet she was meant to be, and can be at times, a kind little woman. She is very devout, but she has a bullying way of praying which seems to show very little trust. Sometimes, if she wants any special thing, she says a thousand "Hail Maries." I suggested to her that I should dislike my children to go on worrying like that, but she explained to me that was just what she hoped to do, to worry till she got what she wanted—and then, to add insult to injury, if she gets it she says a thousand more in thanksgiving. Imagine your feelings when you got to about the four hundred and ninetyninth time, and, what is vastly more important, imagine Our Lady's.

The other is younger, and if she hadn't been consumed with the same ridiculous jealousy, she would, I should think, have been quite pleasant. She has apparently made getting married the one end and aim of her existence, and has failed, poor thing, but won't own it and is still pursuing, which is a mistake. She is very kind to the wounded, and is, I think, beginning to be ashamed of the petty warfare which she has carried on unceasingly against us, and which would have been amusing in its utter childishness if it hadn't been so tiring.

Every obstacle has been put in our way, one of the most annoying being the constant hiding anywhere and everywhere of all nursing necessaries, in order to delay us and to give us the maximum amount of trouble in finding them.

The hostility and petty persecution of these women has been all the more marked because it has been such a contrast to the way we have been treated by everyone else. Nothing could exceed the kindness shown to us. Innumerable little acts of courtesy in and out of the town have welcomed us with that easy, charming French graciousness which in our shy, self-conscious England would have been quite impossible.

The most serious part of the feeling stirred up in the hospital was the effect it had upon the *infirmiers*, who, backed by the surveillante, started by being aggressively disobedient and impertinent. We saw something must be done at once, so we went to the doctors, who put an end to it with no uncertain hand, to the very evident chagrin of the surveillante, who then tried telling lies about us with them, till she at last realised it was waste of time, as no one believed her, so she gave it up.

In every other way we pretended to be entirely unconscious of the electricity of the atmosphere, and the ruder they were the more charming we were, which of course must have been intensely annoying, and so they evidently found it.

Chance words of the doctors on the improvement in the hospital, and on the cleanliness of this or that corner of it, would send up their temperatures to an alarming height, and feverish debates would take place afterwards on the stairs or in the passages, in which voices rose too high for us to be entirely unconscious of the drift of their words; the result of these conversations sometimes was a sudden descent to the office of the Médecin Chef and then silence—which is the exact opposite of what I am enjoying at this moment. I am ill, and an exquisite southern voice from the barracks opposite is floating into the window behind me. If troubadours sang like that, I am not surprised they broke many hearts. The only thing which would have saved me might have been a sight of the singer. Is there any greater bathos in this world than when, strung up to heaven by the strains of a really exquisite voice, you suddenly catch sight of the common box (you can call it nothing else) from which it is coming. But I can't see into the barracks, so I'm happy.

CHAPTER V

THE MÉDECIN CHEF

It is difficult to give a true picture of the Médecin Chef. He is at the same time so attractive and yet, in some respects, so unsatisfactory. He is courtesy itself to everyone, and though naturally a quick, hot-tempered man, nothing can exceed his patience with women and children who come to consult him.

The other day a poor woman was quite determined he should come and see her small child who was ill; a civilian doctor was already looking after her, and it was quite impossible for him to go. She was also taking up his valuable time, but his admirable tact and courtesy never failed him, and, judged by the infinite care and trouble he took to comfort her and to explain to her what steps she could take if she were not satisfied with the present medical attention the child was having, she might have been a queen who was commanding his attention. Never for one moment did he forget she was the anxious mother of a suffering child.

His drawback is his weakness. It is no good expecting anything strong or decided from him ; you are doomed to disappointment after disappointment. I didn't know it was possible for words from anyone in supreme authority to mean so little ; wrongs want righting, but in the end they are generally left—it would cause friction or be disagreeable to someone, therefore let it slide. Flagrant wrongdoers wanted punishing, and we quaked at first when we heard him angry, but we soon found his words meant nothing—they were words, just idle words, as everyone else in the hospital already knew.

No, it's a pity, and the never being able to depend on him ruins a strangely lovable character. His kindness to us has never varied, though our fiery denunciations and complaints of things bad for our patients which we found going on in the hospital must have been extraordinarily trying to his peace-at-any-price-loving nature.

Fortunately, though, he has a sense of humour, and our northern energy must be an amusing contrast in this "*laisser aller*" *mañana* southern town. I think he really cares for us and depends on us, and is wise enough to see that if you suddenly plant English nurses in the middle of your hospital, you must sacrifice a certain amount of peace of mind for the privilege; but his unvarying courtesy is really wonderful. I have bullied him unceasingly, with Crib urging me on whenever she has detected any signs of reluctance or slackness on my part. One day especially, when I arrived as usual in his bureau with more requests and more things to be set right, he welcomed me with such courtliness and expressed such pleasure at seeing me that I quickly explained to him that the pleasure would be less when he knew why I had come, and all the complaints I was bringing. But he insisted that it was a pleasure, adding with infinite charm, "Mais oui, madame, parceque j'ai bien trouvé que dans vos plaintes il y a toujours du fond!" It was generous, and it is always pleasant to have the reasonableness of one's complaints understood—that is one thing, but to get things definitely altered is unfortunately quite another, and we have to be content with reforms very far short of what we want and ask for; but things are gradually altering, which would be comforting if we understood the art of putting off and waiting, as it is understood down here.

The only time the Médecin Chef has shown any trace of irritation with us was when, in our great fight against the bugs which infested the whole place, Crib upstairs and I downstairs both asked leave, evidently within a few minutes of one another, to burn all the bedding and the wooden part of the beds, as being the only effectual way of getting rid of them. What a time we had in making people realise the state of things and then in getting rid of it!

At first the fact itself was flatly contradicted, but one morning when one of the young soldiers, a convalescent out of my scarlet-fever ward, couldn't sleep at night and in the morning was covered with swollen bites, and when, in spite of my insisting it was bugs, it was declared to be *une maladie du sang* "very common in such cases," I felt it was high time the nonsense should end, and after the doctor's rounds, I and the *infirmier* set to work and collected, from the bed and bedding alone, of the boy who couldn't sleep, some dozens of the most awful-looking beasts, grandfathers and great-grandfathers of prolific tribes of bugs. All these we carefully put into a box, which I then took down to the Médecin Chef as an example of the *maladie du sang* from which our patients were suffering. He couldn't help laughing in spite of his disgust, but it was very extraordinary how little anyone appeared to feel the disgrace of having a hospital in such a state of filth.

The *econome* was apparently responsible for the cleanliness of the beds, but nothing seemed to make him care until I fortunately made the *infirmiers* cut off and throw away a very dirty bit of sacking from one of the mattresses. That roused him and he appeared, which gave him his chance and me mine. I took it, and I don't *think* he will tackle me again in a hurry. The Médecin Chef, if he heard, was tactful enough to keep his door shut.

But however much we worry him he is proud of us, and he is like a baby in his utter joy at having English ladies to show off at "inspections," when generals and prefects and people of that kind come round. You hear perhaps a gentle "Suivez toujours," and as you throw open the doors of your wards and bow them in and out, you can't help seeing that his bliss is full to overflowing, and fortunately he doesn't know how ridiculous the whole thing seems to us, as those are just the times when we can't feel real, and only feel we are acting. He is acting just as much, though. He is very vague, and has no notion what most of the people are suffering from, the ordinary rounds being always taken by the other doctors; but he is quick, and one word whispered by his secretary, who has to be on the alert the whole time, is enough to give him the drift of the case, though sometimes when he speaks of cases as being of "special interest," when you perhaps have just prompted the secretary to prompt him, it is very funny, and only fit for a stage.

CHAPTER VI

OUR PATIENTS

FRENCH soldiers no doubt have their faults, but we have found them extraordinarily unspoilt and very delightful to nurse. They are so simple and childlike, which, when people are entirely dependent on you, makes everything so much easier, and their implicit trust in you and, in many cases, their real gratitude is very touching.

Of course with conscription you get a much more educated class, taking them on the whole, than was possible to be found in our English soldiers before the war, however much that has changed now, but we are struck by the charm of the ordinary French soldier. We have several hundreds of them to deal with and new ones are always passing through our hands, but we are all conscious of the same fact. People say they are so immoral—they may be right, we only know them in our hospitals; but judging from anything we see or hear, they seem to be as healthy-minded, clean-living, nice-looking a set of men or boys (for many of them are no more) as you could find anywhere, and the moment they are out of pain and have finished crying for their mothers, they are delightfully gay and bright and fresh, and very easily amused. There must be good and bad among them as among all sets of people, but we feel we must have had more than our share of good.

We have a strange mixture of French nationalities down here, so that we get all kinds of French accents and all kinds of patois. Some of the men don't even understand each other—the Basques especially seem quite out of it, as they speak an entirely different language, and apparently one which even Frenchmen, living in the country round, find the greatest difficulty in learning, unless they have been brought up to it from childhood; but, judging from the Basques we have known here, they seem a very gentle, patient, sweet-tempered race, and their quick understanding ways and bright smiles more than make up for our not being able to understand each other.

At first our patients were very muddled as to what we really were like, so strange were the stories which they were always hearing about us, and our ideas about the use of water and open windows were evidently very different from anything they had ever been accustomed to. The feeling, especially in the typhoid ward, was certainly very acutely against us at one time. They were terrified of washing and fresh air, and the surveillante, working on their terror, was able to do a lot of mischief; but they gradually began to find out that we really did care for their comfort, and that that was the only point of our being here, and at last they realised that there was method even in our madness.

The whole atmosphere then changed, and those we have nursed through long weary illnesses are quite touching in their devotion and belief in us.

A French lieutenant in Crib's division grasped at once the agitation against us, and was very amused and pleased with the answers he got from two of our men when he tried to find out one day in the garden what they really thought about us. They upheld us so chivalrously and hotly, that it was almost too much for one man who had suffered awfully and wasn't yet strong enough for any agitation. He nearly cried in his vehemence.

The lieutenant was sent back to us from the trenches with shattered nerves. He soon got better, and he would have been very nice if he hadn't been one of the many pestilential little free-thinkers, who in their ludicrous conceit and overweening arrogance seem to be holding back victory, and to be a far greater danger to us than any German devilry.

It was painful to hear him and to know that his three children were being brought up without any knowledge of God, and what made it worse was that his mother had evidently been a very good and charming woman, so that he had no excuse ; but the young educated classes in France seem to a terrible degree to be suffering from a deadly cult of self-sufficiency, with a hideous creed in which the Incarnation and Redemption and Resurrection have no part. The French seem generally to have a quick sense of humour, but you wonder where it can be when some of their young men, delighted with the sound of their own voices, insist on parading their own blasphemous creed, as if what their poor diseased brains have invented could be of any interest to anyone except to specialists studying germs.

I hate arguing, but we have to make some protest, and we take care that none of them leave us feeling grand.

Democracy gone to seed is, I suppose, mainly responsible for this lamentable want of faith in everything above themselves. France is a marvellously democratic country, which is interesting after the bridgeless gulfs between class and class in England. Perhaps this war will help to bridge them—let us hope so; but, though democracy has its excellent side, I trust we shall never see it in England if it must necessarily bring in its train, in the lives of those who accept it, an inability to recognise all worth and beauty above their own dull level.

Socialism has had a very strong hold on France too, but, from what we can make out from our soldiers, they feel that this war will have given it a staggering blow, as the Socialist party is the one blamed for the absolute unpreparedness of the country, and for the loss of tens of thousands of lives. It is difficult to say whether this is true or not, but apparently, even before the war, the would-be disciples of Socialism had begun to realise that though words never failed, and although, undoubtedly, there was something attractive in the doctrine of it being right not only to covet but to steal everything you can get from those more blessed in this world's goods than yourself—they had begun, also, to realise that helping those less well off formed no more part of the Socialist creed in France than in other countries, and, as most of them belonged to a class poorer than that to which their leaders belonged, and so had gained nothing—and as example is infinitely better than precept—the influence of Socialism on their lives had already begun to wane.

CHAPTER VII

THE FRENCH PEASANT

THE peasants in France are as attractive as our Highland peasants in Scotland. They are delightful people, and it is splendid to see the plucky way the women are keeping the country together now, with their husbands and sons away in their depots or hospitals or at the front.

The French peasant-women always help in their fields, but now the heavy farm work and the management of the beasts falls to them too, and quite splendidly have they come to the fore. They are wonderful in the brave, persevering, bright way they are working in spite of all their trouble and anxiety. Every woman has some story of tragedy and loss, and yet there she is full of courtesy and kindly welcome, and still going on. There are still the animals to be fed, still the children to be looked after, and still their daily bread to be earned. How little she knows what a blessing in disguise just that fact of being obliged to work without stopping really is for her!

None of us can afford to waste time in thinking just at present—it is too costly—or in envying other people for being able to do just what we should have loved to do and feel we could have done so well. That is still more costly.

There is a special work waiting for every single one of us, both in our homes and outside them, however incapable and useless we may feel, that no one else in the world, however capable, could do as well.

It may not be what we wish it were, but it is there all the same.

I am sitting writing in the shade in the most lovely country, with cows and silver-grey poplar trees round me, and a glorious foaming bluey-green river rushing past me. I don't get on very fast with what I am doing because there are so many people in the world just now longing for a little sympathy, and even in these beautiful out-of-the-way glades there are still woodcutters, and women looking after cows, and wounded soldiers, each with their own history of suffering and sorrow. It seems a relief to some of them just to squat down by your side and let you share in it all. It is awful to be able to do nothing, but you love them all. The world can never be the same again, but they have accepted it simply and pluckily ; only the tragic looks of men whose wives and children are in German hands, and from whom they are never allowed to hear, make you realise once again what much worse griefs there are than death. What are these fathers and husbands going to find after the war in the invaded parts of France? Death is, in many cases, for those they love most the only thing left to long for.

Old age has gone out of fashion in England, but the French peasants wisely haven't done away with it, and you still see fascinating pictures of beautiful old women in white caps, looking after their cattle or geese, who are neither too grand nor too educated to come day after day to their old parish church to lay the heavy burden of this war at the foot of the Cross, and to plead for help for all those engaged in it. As one of our soldiers said to us the other day, if you couldn't take your burdens there, how would it be possible to bear them! His wife and children are in the hands of the Germans.

Another of our soldiers, an unbeliever, asked me not long ago to give him a proof that Christianity and its sacraments weren't mere myths conveying no real grace, and then almost in the same breath he owned the striking difference there was in the trenches between the ordinary layman and the priest, who is now obliged to live and work side by side with him. What a sacrifice the war has meant to them of all they hold most dear, and how utterly unsuited in temperament and education many of them must be, having had in a moment, without any real preparation, to exchange their churches for the front. Think how repugnant the whole life must be to many of them, and yet this lieutenant owned that their whole bearing was different from, and infinitely superior to those around them. He gave us a wonderful account of a young officer in their mess, whom they all admired as something right above them, full of life and joy, and evidently bearing witness magnificently to the faith that was in him. One day, when he was praising him to a fellow-officer, he found out by chance that he was a priest and that he had only just been ordained when the war broke out, but he—this free-thinker—said it didn't surprise him, because he was so immeasurably superior to everyone else. How strange for a myth to have that effect! And stranger still that those who most revile it should expect so much from it.

Although the relations of our soldiers, who come to see them, and the people in the town here are all extraordinarily nice to us, the dignity and charming simplicity of the peasant is entirely wanting in the classes above him. We are struck by the truth of what our grandmother used to say, *i.e.* that French people are peacocks on parade but pigs in the kitchen! I have never seen such a contrast as a Frenchwoman in her own rooms in the morning and the same woman out in the town in the afternoon. The dirty, unkempt slatternliness of the one simply isn't recognisable in the finished fashion-plate of the other. Certainly if I were a man and proposed to a girl in the afternoon, I should break it off when I saw her in the morning. *Anything* will do for their own relations.

When we were talking about the luxury and the ceaseless pursuit of pleasure in both our countries, a Frenchman out here, a friend of ours, said, "Yes, but we are not so luxurious as you are—we save our money for the cafés and for dressing our wives, if possible, better than other people's, but we don't in the least care where we sleep. We shouldn't mind a stable-yard, but you spend on your homes and on outside things as well." It was very true.

The greater part of the French people, at least the bourgeoisie, have no homes. Any little lodging, however gloomy, seems to content them, and " Home " means nothing to them. Even when they are ill they like their café acquaintances to pour in one after another to cheer them up. They never want to be alone, they just want a box-room where they keep what they don't want and make as much mess as they like, but they don't want a home. It is very uncosy from our point of view, but our way of shutting ourselves up into our shells is equally incomprehensible to them.

While I have been ill, Crib has had the greatest difficulty in keeping people out of my room, but after the first day or two she managed it, which was clever of her. She may have suggested that she wouldn't answer for my mental condition if they came, that I don't know, but anyway it was successful in frightening them away.

Their sense of humour is a little tiring when it gets on to their favourite topic of "purges" and pills and their effects; and when you are ill you are rather at their mercy, and you don't feel up to it. They seem to consider all details of that kind subjects of intense public interest, and men and women at table d'hôte or anywhere will keep everyone's attention rapt with stories which in England could only be thought amusing in the slums, if there, because the strange part of them is just their utter lack of anything really funny.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PHARMACIEN

THERE are great dangers in our hospital; the first is the *pharmacien.* Why anyone ever gets better here when there is anything serious the matter with them, I can't imagine, so awful are the perils they run, one after another.

To begin with, the *pharmacien* drinks. You never know in what state you will find him. When he isn't drinking he is extraordinarily nice, but that is very rare. He generally begins to rave as you go in to the pharmacy, and raves without stopping till you leave it, and everything you ask for is a signal for a fresh outburst against the ghastly waste that is always going on, especially since *you* were there. He stands wringing his hands and gesticulating in the middle of the room, or with his back against the door you have just come in by, so that you can't get away, while he explains to you the number of pyramidon or aspirin cachets you have used in the last twenty-four hours (he is never, of course, right), and he is full of what he hears in the town about where the medicines go. That always sounds very interesting and mysterious, and I long to know what he really does hear, but my curiosity is never satisfied, which is disappointing. He is never definite, but he could always, if he liked, tell me things which would astonish me. I long to be astonished, but finding longing no good, I try again and again to get what I came for—but no. He then goes on in support of his anonymous charges to show me how absolutely and utterly unfair it all is, and how impossible it is for him to run his work under such conditions. I agree that it must be extraordinarily trying, but would he give me some special medicine which I want at once? then, screaming at me all the time that I must have patience, that he has only two hands, and that he can't be in two places at once—all of which statements sound quite irrefutable, but the application of which to the particular case in point is difficult to trace—he gives me what I have come for.

His trump card at first was to threaten to report me to the Médecin Chef, but he doesn't do that so often now. It somehow didn't have the effect for which he had hoped, and if I really didn't mind, it dawned on him that perhaps it was hardly worth his trouble, particularly as the Médecin Chef's office was nowhere near the pharmacy; but I should like to have known what he would have said when he got there.

Once he did go as far as sending word to the authorities that I had used fifty cachets of quinine, and had asked for fifty more the same morning. I knew nothing about it, but I was asked to go down to the office, where I found the Médecin Chef, with his usual extreme courtliness, anxious to know how many of my patients were having quinine, and he then told me of the complaint he had had. The whole thing of course was nonsense, so I explained that I thought the *pharmacien's* head was a little weak at times (we were none of us low enough to call it by its real name), and he smiled and thanked me, and bowed me out of his very gracious presence.

Just about the same time the French ladies upstairs arrived at the office to complain that I was *hautaine* in my manner to them, and again he interviewed me with admirable tact; the one who had been more than usually impertinent to us that morning had come to him about it. I owned that I probably had been, and we both laughed. I longed to tell him the whole story, and how insufferable they consistently were, but as they had stolen a march on me, and having learnt from my babyhood from many brothers that *tu quoque* was always the sign of a blackguard (though why, thinking of it in my riper years, it should be, I don't quite see), I didn't; but went, to the delight of the Médecin Chef, to the Frenchwoman to apologise for hurting her *feelings*. At the same time I spoke to her kindly but firmly on her attitude to us. She was astonished that we had seen and heard so much, and very much taken aback, and her usual fluency forsook her. Since that she has been quite different, which is nice.

CHAPTER IX

ABOUT MEDICINES

THE next great danger to the whole place is myself. Our advance has been rapid. We came just to help, and are now, owing to the lack of nurses, the heads of the two divisions in which all the serious cases are, and when the young doctor, who had charge of the distribution of the medicines and wines and coffee, left a few weeks after our arrival, that was all given over to me. I expect, if they had searched the whole world over, they couldn't have found anyone less suitable. They simply didn't know me, and Crib, of course, wasn't going to give me away ; in fact she encouraged me and said I must do it, though how she reconciled it with her conscience I don't know, because she knows how impossibly dreamy I am, and what a byword I have been in my family for it ever since I was a child, and she knows only too well the traps laid for me at home, into which up to this day I always fall in deep unconsciousness, in spite of the amusement of everyone round me.

It may be amusing to others, but it's an awful drawback in ordinary life to be walking about so lost in your thoughts that someone may speak to you again and again without your knowing, till at last with a real effort you wake ; and though you know how intensely annoying it must be for other people, you can't help being rather offended if *they* are, as you feel they might have let you know somehow that they were going to speak.

Dick and the children are wonderfully

patient, but passing people you know without being even conscious of their existence, and putting coals into your mouth and bread on the fire, or potatoes into your glass and water on to your plate, may have rather disagreeable consequences for yourself if not for others.

One woman in the East never got over my cutting her. I tried to explain, but, poor thing—it wasn't surprising—she didn't understand, as she naturally didn't expect to meet lunatics outside asylums, and that, on the top of our refusing to go to her big dinner on the Thursday in Holy Week, quite did for us.

But just imagine the danger these poor soldiers are running. They think I know everything, and how astonished they would be if they only knew how incompetent I really was; but fortunately the bottles are marked with the numbers of their beds, and they all of them can read, which is a comfort, so that if I give Keating's Powder instead of Gregory, and pomade divine instead of fluid magnesia, they would probably find out before they had had many doses.

Occasionally a man takes his whole bottle at once, but no one seems to mind much. We explain to him that that isn't the usual way of taking medicine, and then we start again. We are beginning to think there must be a good deal of humbug in medicines, and in illnesses too; if a whole bottle isn't too strong, one teaspoonful of it can't be a dose which does you much good, and after looking on infectious diseases with great awe and wondering whether it is safe for the children to play with other children, whose nursery-maid three weeks before had been found to be writing to the mother of a child with mumps, we suddenly find ourselves, again from lack of anyone else, nursing wards of scarlet fever, measles, mumps, erysipelas, and typhoid all at the same time for month after month without apparently—without boasting—any evil effects either to our patients from the extraordinary conglomeration of germs we must be carrying with us, or to ourselves.

We started splendidly by having eau sublimée always ready, but that became less and less honoured in its use, and by sucking carbolic lozenges and formaline without stopping, but they made Crib's throat very uncomfortable, and gradually we forgot all about them, and now practically the only time we really disinfect (and then only our hands) is when we have dressings to do or injections to give.

People, I find, feel ridiculously grand about "doing dressings," and look up to you with much respect when they find you can do them, so I manage to let it be known that we do them, as often as possible. It is quite pleasant to be grand when it costs you nothing, but really, though I shouldn't like some people to hear me say so, it is anything but grand.

Putting a bit of lint on a cut finger with an old rag round it is a dressing, and cobwebs used to be another, and filling wounds with sawdust was a common one in Borneo, but in the best regulated society, and this is of course the best, the last two dressings seem rather out of fashion!

Why our typhoids especially ever get well is most wonderful. We can guard them from a certain amount of danger, but the risks they are always running are too awful. I found one with bread and cheese one day, and Crib a day or two ago found a man who has been ill for months and who was, we hardly dared to hope, just out of danger, eating two stale pastry things given to him by one of the authorities, a Frenchwoman upstairs. It was so like her. The tartlets were in honour of her birthday; and she was kind-hearted and she didn't want him to feel out of it, so she inconsequently risked his life.

That sort of thing is trying, particularly if you are bad-tempered, and having so constantly to be on the look-out to defend your patients against the very people who ought to be helping you to take care of them is really rather annoying. It is quite true what we were told when we came, that no properly-trained English nurse could stand it.

It isn't that there aren't many well-trained, excellent French nurses—a French friend of ours has been doing admirable work with an English friend in one of the other hospitals here, but the demand so far exceeds the supply that some places have come off verybadly, and many of the women and girls who, *faute de mieux*, have been accepted are, unfortunately for the wounded, unsuitable in every way.

What a world of strange contrasts we live in! These gay, bright, independable little Frenchwomen, never happy except when they have someone to talk to, giving you a sense of movement and life and ceaseless change, flitting like butterflies from one acquaintance to another, only intent, like the Athenians, on hearing and telling some new thing. What a contrast to their restful background of mountains and those old castles on which century after century of wind and storm have made no appreciable difference! There they are still, and there they will be, so far as one can see, in another thousand years. What tragedies those dungeons have seen, and what thrilling histories those walls could tell if for a short time they might be given life: and then how lovely this valley is! You long for an artist's pen so as to be able to take it to others, such beauty, such peace, and yet a few minutes from you the hideousness of war is only too plain in all its crudeness in hospital after hospital, and a clanging hammer resounding at intervals through the air, both by day and night, from an *usine*, which is turning out heavy shells by thousands, never lets you forget the grim struggle in which we are engaged.

CHAPTER X

FRENCH CHARACTERISTICS

It is difficult to estimate in any way the hold the Church has on her people out here. France has produced such wonderful saints that perhaps, after knowing a little of the lives of only two of them, General de Sonis and the Curé d'Ars, you expect too much of their countrymen, but you are disappointed and disillusioned at every turn, with a few refreshing exceptions.

An old priest still says mass every morning in the chapel here which used to belong to the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, and his reverence and devotion is very marked. There is also a very devout, half-blind old woman who lived with the Sisters, and who now looks after the chapel for the magnificent sum of not quite two francs a week; she is sometimes the only congregation, but you feel that the whole hospital would be poorer if it weren't for those two. I met the old woman coming back from the town one day with two parcels, and she explained them at once to me in her own quaint way as "Un cierge pour la Sainte Vierge et un saucisson pour nous—on doit penser à tout." I quite agreed.

Her piety is a great mixture. We all have *déjeuner* together, which by the way is not exactly joy, especially when they go in for the delirious delight of a dish of garden snails; and when the other food, which owing to the war and to a not over-clean or over-intelligent Spanish cook is always more or less uneatable, is worse than usual, her cries to Heaven are really very funny. She is very good and resigned, but she doesn't know how to bear it, poor old thing, and I am not surprised, but I think she is probably saved a good deal by her blindness, as she doesn't see the odds and ends of flies and other animals which seem at home in the dishes, and which don't exactly tend to make things more appetising, though perhaps more nourishing, for those who *can* see—and she always has the chapel to comfort her.

But there is very little devotion about most of the Church people and little apparent realisation of what they are doing. Directly mass is over, without one word of thanksgiving, they rush out with a "Well, that's over" look in their whole bearing, even now that all of them have people at the front dependent on their prayers; and in our hospitals here it is so different from what it ought to be.

In two of them there certainly is a charming old *aumônier*, who is always in and out and visits as he likes, and who is loved by all of us, nurses and patients. He was one of the chaplains at the front in the Franco-Prussian War too, and you feel as if the world were a better place every time he comes near you; but in our special hospital, which is supposed to receive all the worst cases, no priest ever comes near us.

We asked why, and were told, "The military authorities don't encourage them." Imagine St. Paul being kept back from his work, and giving up his journeys, because those in power didn't encourage him; and really, military authorities, perhaps more than any other authority, would be the last to interfere with anything which was for the good of their men, and the first to admire any priest who consistently did his work, and all the more so if they were conscious of having put obstacles in his way.

So, not content with that excuse, and backed by the old Franco-Prussian *aumônier*, and having men dangerously ill round us, I found out who was our real chaplain and called on him.

He was at his *déjeuner*, and I quite agreed with his housekeeper that it would be wiser to wait till that was over. It is always wiser to wait till a man has fed, particularly when you have made up your mind that he must do something he may not want to do; so I went into the cathedral and came back in half an hour, when I was at once introduced into his presence. I explained and he listened and made excuses, and promised to come the next day. He was quite gracious, and asked me twice for my name. I begged him to excuse me, but explained to him that, owing to the strong jealousy which reigned, it was better for him to come up to the hospital and not to ask for us, in fact to appear absolutely unconscious of our presence; but, just as a little guide to him, and as I didn't mean to be there, I gave him the numbers of two or three men among those who were the most seriously ill, so that he might cheer them up a little—one especially, who had just lost his eldest boy in a sudden two days' illness, but I impressed upon him that *we* must be kept entirely out of it.

He arrived as he promised, and I heard afterwards that he walked straight into one of the big wards, and sent word to one of the men that he had come to hear his confession, which startled him out of his wits and sent his temperature up, as he said he didn't know he was dying and he wasn't. Then, by way of finishing a thoroughly tactful visit, he explained to those in charge that it was the English lady who had sent him.

The whole thing was a failure just from stupidity and want of tact. We had longed for someone to come and cheer them up, and to help them to bear their pain and suffering—someone who would show them they cared and understood what it meant to be ill, and alone, in some cases days away from home, but, as I have said, it was a dead failure, and I don't think I shall try again till there is a change of chaplains.

The pity of it was, it just gave one more weapon to those who were against priests being allowed to come in and out as they like. It is so grievous to have them looked upon as undertakers, and then not quite as proper ones. When one of our young soldiers died the other day, the other people in the room might have been heathen, judging by their utter lack of any reverence, but I am thankful to say Crib was there, and when she wanted a priest, they explained to her that one had been smuggled in to give him the last sacraments that morning, but they spoke of it as if it were something illegal, and the surveillante entreated us not to let the house-surgeon know.

We are just waiting to have it out. It will only be one more of the many fights we have already had with him. He is a great friend of ours, but he is unfortunately one of those who—tried by the artificiality and unreality of the religion many of us profess, a religion in which the sacraments are abused and used as charms, while the grace given in them is forgotten directly it is given—has practically thrown over everything, or at least has tried to, but, from the mere fact that the revulsion sprang from love of truth and a hatred of its counterfeit, has not been allowed to.

The things he says jar dreadfully sometimes, but at the front one of his friends told us how different he was. I wish he were well enough to go back again, as the reality of things there might finish his conversion ; and he is a first-rate doctor, full of sympathy and tact and strength. (He doesn't know English, so I can say what I like.)

The whole hospital is different when he is there.

Some people might call him hard, but he is the very opposite really, only he has no mercy on malingerers, and he is a very quick judge of character, so quick that you would think he must often be wrong, and perhaps he is, but professionally I have never seen him make a mistake.

One poor unfortunate soldier, terrified at going to the front and determined to get out of it if possible, went into the hospital at the *caserne*, where he was apparently so seriously ill that they sent him to us. A man with a distorted face of agony arrived, requiring I don't know how many men to move him from the stretcher into his bed for fear of giving him the least jar. The doctor came round later and looked unmoved at his face drawn with pain, and then started a regime of utter bullying, in which the poor wretch was obliged to live on a mixed diet of *points de feu* and milk and hygienic exercises. But he kept up the farce, and even when the doctor, at the end of a few days, told him what he thought of him in no measured terms and sent him back to his work, he still refused to give up the rôle he was playing, and limped heavily out of the hospital gates; but three minutes after, forgetting he could be seen from the back, he was walking away as straightly and strongly as anyone, much, I expect, to the relief of those who had had any doubts on the subject.

When people are really ill, though, he takes infinite trouble and is kindness and tenderness itself, and when he is obliged to give pain his patients know he cares, and have such complete confidence in him that everything seems more bearable to them. Poor man, he knows what suffering is himself; the war has seen to that.

Frenchmen have much to learn from us in the way they treat their women.

I wouldn't be a Frenchman's wife or daughter for anything in this world. The want of all real trust and liberty, and the atmosphere (in the case of many wives and husbands) of jealousy and petty unfounded suspicions must be a stifling one to live in. They may know their own people best, but

Frenchmen, speaking generally, haven't the same reverence for womanhood as Englishmen have, and they lose their heads much quicker; certainly the unfaithfulness of many wives even now, with their husbands defending their country at the front, is too evident to be questioned; but surely it is just that atmosphere of want of trust, that perpetual being watched which is responsible for it all.

You generally get out of people what you expect; if you expect good you find it, but if you expect evil you find that too, and Frenchwomen seem to be bound in on every side by ridiculous conventionalities. They are not allowed to cross the road without a father or a husband holding their hand, so that it is only natural that when, as now, that hand is in so many cases gone, many of them shouldn't know how to walk straight.

CHAPTER XI

OUR NATIONAL CONCEIT

THE more you travel, the more you realise, however much there may be to avoid, how much there is to learn in and from every country. We are still wonderfully frog-like in our point of view of anything that is not English. When we get to the top of the hill, though the whole world is lying at our feet, we keep our eyes thrown back on our own land and see nothing to improve.

Our attitude reminds me always of a speech I heard made by the headmaster of one of our great English public schools. A great effort had been made and a meeting arranged to rouse England to the fact that the Church teaching in our schools left much to be desired, and he came to help. After our anxiously waiting for what he had to say, he just got up and stated that in his school everything in that way was quite perfect and couldn't be improved, which was so helpful that it looked like a practical joke, only apparently he didn't mean it for one.

How insular and how utterly unworthy, and yet that is what we are doing all over the world. We are so self-satisfied that we can't open our eyes and see ourselves as others see us, and resting on the oars of our grandfathers and contented with their glorious past, we blind ourselves to the fact that everything has changed since then except the one eternal, remorseless fact that never without ceaseless effort and ceaseless self-sacrifice will any real progress be made.

Years ago in China, with supply and demand enormously increased, we found the German goods and other nations' goods preferred in many cases to ours, and their trade increasing day by day, not because they were better—oh no—but because we wouldn't give them exactly what they wanted. We knew best: of course we did—we were English. They wanted a different shade of colour, a different shape or different lengths of stuff—all details—yes, but details which, if attended to, would have made a vast difference to our position in the world to-day.

Then in Africa it has been just the same thing. German firms springing up and becoming more and more patronised everywhere.

Why is this?

Simply because the Germans are better men of business, having learnt the secret of taking infinite trouble to achieve their ends.

Is our national conceit going to be allowed to ruin us ?

Are we always to be above learning from other countries ? Can we really, for instance, taking only one example, think that our system of teaching modern languages is better than the Continental one ? Isn't our knowledge of the French language, as a nation, quite deplorable ? isn't it as big a failure as it well could be ? and yet here we are, apparently quite content with it. Thousands of our children leave school every year, having worked at French for ten or more years, without understanding the simplest question addressed to them in the same language. You find their knowledge of grammar is perfect, down to being able to use with fluency (*in exercise books*) the subjunctive imperfect after pastindicative tenses! No Frenchman ever does it, and Madame de Sévigné ridicules it in her letters, but that apparently doesn't matter in the least to us.

Our parents were taught "A fin que nous mangeassions," so were we, and so must our children be, though it is never used in France.

We have surely forgotten the whole point of language as a medium for understanding, and the mutual goodwill and sympathy understanding always brings, when we leave on one side as unnecessary the living language, and confine ourselves to the dry bones of its structure. It is like trying to teach a child the whole science of physical culture in the development of its body before it has learned to walk.

It is ridiculous, and worse than that, it is wicked waste of time and money. Any child taught properly ought to have a sufficient vocabulary, and to be able to express itself in any modern language after about two years, if not less, and every language learnt is a most valuable asset for any man or woman to start life with.

People are never tired of saying "English will carry you anywhere," but a good many of us are rather tired of hearing it, it is so silly and so untrue. English will no doubt carry anyone in all the big hotels in places habitually patronised by us, but wander a few hundred yards from the beaten route, and we find how impossibly handicapped we are unless we have some knowledge of the language of the country in which we are travelling. A whole life, a whole world teeming with interest is shut to us. Why? Because we are too self-satisfied and too lazy to make the effort which opening the door to it all means.

We never give ourselves the chance of studying with an unbiassed mind the people among whom we live, unless they have had the good fortune to be British born. We don't in the least care what their likes or dislikes are ; we ride roughshod over them. It seems strange that we should so forget the first elements of good breeding, and that we should be found so lacking in sympathy, but in our ignorance it is so.

We have forgotten what we stand for, but we have now got another chance ; are we going to take it ? Is England going to be the same luxurious, irresponsible, pleasure-seeking country in the next twenty years that it has been in the last twenty ? Or will this terrible war teach us, by its glorious inspiring records of supreme self-sacrifice, the capability for work and service latent in each one of us, a capability which, before the war undreamed of, will now be used? May it be so.

Let us bridge over the next twenty years and look back. What do we see? Do we see that this awful and costly offering of strong beautiful life was not in vain? That the England which has come out of it is a purified nation with the courage of its opinions? Do we see that the youth of England are being taught to face and to accept disappointments bravely, to think of others, to recognise an authority above themselves, and to say their prayers? Or do we still see a party government, politics which you can't touch without soiling your hands, a legislation based solely on loss or gain of votes, rulers whose one idea is to be kept in power and to sue for popularity by playing on the baser passions of the ignorant, or by appealing to the false sentiment so easily found in all of us ? Do we still see our children brought up to think of no one but themselves, to live in a fairy land of things made easy, with anything requiring effort or self-discipline condemned as bad for the brain, and amusement searched for them by untiring grown-ups, as if it were the one pearl of great price ?

Let us hope not. Motherhood has great responsibilities, and surely England is going to prove that she at last realises this fact she has taken so long in learning. The children of her great empire are not playthings to be laid aside at will, or to be thought of and used only when needed. They are England's flesh and blood, a vital part of her, sons who always fly to her rescue whenever danger threatens, as is their first duty and joy, but may England never forget again that though as her sons they have a right to share in all that affects her for weal or for woe, she as their mother must make them her first consideration, and recognise that her relationship to them gives them a claim on her to which no other nations in the world have a right to aspire.

England has been living on its reputation and has been much to blame, but may it now be wise enough to see its own faults, generous enough to own them, and strong enough to correct them, so that never again can one of France's greatest writers say, and say so truly, that the outlook which prevails in England is an insular one—not European, not world-wide, but "insular."

May the British Empire of which we have reason to be so proud, the British Empire for which so many of those we love most have given themselves and still are giving themselves day by day to their undying honour, may it always be worthy of the blood which has been so generously spilt for it, and once again in the history of nations may the whole world see that no sacrifice is too great for the British Empire when justice and right and the defence of the weak are the ends for which she is struggling.

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